

# Call It What You Want

orangeangora

## **Call It What You Want by orangeangora**

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**Characters:** Ben Hanscom, Beverly Marsh, Bill Denbrough

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**Summary:**

Ben isn't looking forward to the summer, but things might just turn around.

## 1. Chapter 1

2:04

2:04

The clock hangs like a full moon above Ben's head, its hands stubbornly stalled, as the last class of the day stretches out even longer.

2:04

2:04

Ben glances away, willing the hands to progress by sheer will. He forces himself to wait, to count to ten before he re-checks yet again.

2:05

It's working. A watched clock never moves. Of course, he knows all that is bunk. It just seems that way sometimes like the best way to get what you want is to do the opposite, as if God is possessed of a sadistic sense of humor at least when it comes to being a kid.

2:05

Ben swears that it's moving twice as slowly as usual. It has to be, that's the only rational explanation. Around him, he hears the other students shuffling their things, poised to take flight the moment they're released. It's the last day of school which means that today the collective energy waiting to be released has assumed potentially volcanic proportions. Any moment now...

2:14

In a burst of static, the intercom crackles to life. A few kids groan, as their principal's voice announces the usual warnings - about sticking to the town curfew, no matter what. Recently, there's been a local girl gone missing, not to mention the tragic disappearance of a little boy shortly before Ben had moved to town. Bill Denbrough's little brother who went out one day to sail a paper boat and never returned. As the

months passed, the case grew cold, and word was their parents had given up hope by now of finding their youngest again.

The bell shatters the silence - as a thousand or so kids leap up from their seats and explode into the hall, yelling and throwing dog-eared notebooks up in the air and gleefully ignoring the rain of loose-leaf papers, as they head to their lockers for the last time. Ben ducks in the opposite direction of Bill and his friends who are heading directly past the dragon's den - Henry Bowers and his snickering sidekicks, perpetually on the lookout for someone to harass. They're braver than he is, but then again, there's strength in numbers. Luckily, his locker isn't anywhere near the evil trio. Ben stops and fumbles the combination - at his last school, he never locked his locker, but here in Derry, Ben deems it necessary. Besides being bully-prone, Derry isn't like any other town Ben has lived in - and there's been five since he was that old, but that's a whole other set of worries.

The air reeks of sweat, some girl's too strong perfume and lingering chalk dust swirling through the late afternoon sun, as bodies jostle him. Two girls pass him chanting, "No more pencils, no more books..." he guesses ironically, as he remembers singing that when he was in elementary school. The sight of students pairing up brings an unexpected pang of envy, since moving here several months ago, Ben hasn't made any friends yet. He doesn't think his parents have noticed either, absorbed as they usually are in their own adult worlds. But Ben's found something to occupy him - researching the town history, and in doing so, he's stumbled upon what looks more and more like a pattern to the missing kids. In fact, that's where he's heading right now - the library - why not, as it beats returning to an empty house, and he doesn't have any other plans.

Ben slips through the students like a ghost. There's a period right when you move to a new school that everyone notices you, but then after awhile, people stop. To avoid thinking too much about this, he slips in his headphones and switches on his Walkman, as he emerges outside by the bike rack. He takes a quick look around - no bullies in the vicinity and fumbles with the lock. As he does so, he loses his grip on his social studies project and is forced to bend down to retrieve it. Maybe he should just leave it - no, he did work hard on it and got an A, which he might bring up to his parents to avoid

another awkwardly silent dinner tonight.

Suddenly, a shadow falls across his handlebars, and he looks up, up into the eyes of the prettiest girl in his class. Try as he might, he can't quite retrieve her name from memory, although he knows it begins with a B.

"I heard that Henry Bowers is looking for you," she says. There's no mockery in her voice, only friendly concern. Ben blushes and stammers out what he hopes very much is a coherent reply. It must be because she responds, and suddenly they're having a conversation just like that. In his fantasies, he is witty and articulate, but reality proves - it always does - far different. But this reality is better than any fantasies because it's happening now, not in his daydreams.

"I'm Beverly Marsh," she says, holding out her hand. "I didn't know you liked New Kids on the Block."

Again he blushes - what he wouldn't give to find a way to break that habit - but she's not mocking him. Not at all. In fact - could this actually happening - just the opposite.

Suddenly, Ben has a feeling that the summer won't be so bad after all.

End

## 2. Things That Go Bump in the Stacks

### Summary for the Chapter:

Ben's visit to the library does not go exactly as planned.

The hill looms in front of Ben, as daunting as Mount Everest, but narrowing his eyes at the horizon, he keeps pumping the pedals, praying that he can make it to the top without having to get off and walk (what if Beverly should happen by again - unlikely but he does not want to be put in that potentially humiliating position). Keep going, keep going, he thinks, it's only a little farther. You can do it if you close your eyes and concentrate...

He's almost there, and he uses the thought of Beverly, her red hair haloed in the late afternoon light as she talked to him, to spur him on. The last bit is always the hardest to overcome, but somehow he finds himself at the very top triumphant.

Whew. Made it. As he crests the hill on his bike and gratefully coasts down again, Ben realizes he's lucked out doubly - he's made it to his destination - the town library - intact without a bully run-in en route. As the chances of running into Henry Bowers and his gang there are nil - even during the school year - Ben lets himself relax as he climbs the stone steps, weathered from years of patrons' shoes scuffing against them and pushes open the heavy door.

Time always seems to stop when Ben enters the library, all of his ordinary worries suspended until he once again emerges outdoors. He walks past the front desk to find a table. Since it's the last day of school, no one his age is present - not that they don't start reluctantly trickling in until at least three-thirty when school's in session; only elderly patrons are browsing the shelves. None give him a second look, but the librarian nods, signaling that she has something for him, but it will be a minute or two. So Ben takes a seat and slowly unpacks his things. Above him, dust motes glowing gold slowly revolve illuminated by the window light. He looks up eyeing the familiar sign: "No Food or Beverages, No Talking, Please Respect the Rules of the Library." At least the rules here are clear...he wishes

things were that clear in other areas of his life sometimes.

Overall, the library's not a bad place to be if you have yet to make friends in a new town. Still Ben wonders what say, Bill and his friends are doing right now. Swimming at the quarry? At a movie? ("Close Encounters of the Third Kind," he knows, is playing.) At least here, it's air cond...

"A boy your age should be outside getting exercise," a voice intones above his head, interrupting his reverie. Ben startles and stares up into the gaze of the librarian. Everything about her - her neatly coiffed gray hair, brown eyes and flowered dress strikes him as somehow antique, as if the woman does not actually have a life outside the library but - like a "Twilight Zone" character - only comes to life during the day to perform her duties. He blushes, hoping the other patrons don't notice and takes a deep breath, careful not to sound rude.

"Could I have the book, please?" At first, he wonders if she'll withhold it until he gives her a satisfactory answer (though what would that possibly be?), but she finally extends her hand and passes it over.

Thank god, that's over with. Ben makes a mental note not to ask for help again, at least unless it's absolutely necessary and opens the thick volume. If he didn't already know when it had been published - 1947 (wow, that was old) - he would have guessed from the brownish marks around the margins and the fact that the librarian who presumably knew her way around, had had to dig to unearth it. Slowly, Ben turns the pages until he comes to a set of pictures depicting early scenes in Derry history. Although he's managed to pinpoint exactly when the years for missing kids are worst, he can't help but wonder who exactly he should tell. And how. Directly marching into the police station and asking to see the chief doesn't appeal to him - not when it happens to be the father of his main nemesis. But how else to notify the authorities? An anonymous letter perhaps?

Right now, the problem seems insolvable, so Ben puts it from his mind and continues to browse through the old volume. As he does, it seems like the pictures spring to life and move as he manipulates the pages, but that's merely an optical illusion - isn't it?

Ben stops, sensing something odd behind him. He doesn't want to turn around, but he forces himself anyway. Then gapes in astonishment.

A red balloon - untethered but unmistakable - slowly bobs toward him. He looks around for a child to attach to the errant orb, but there's nothing but the usual adult patrons browsing. Could it have detached itself from a display - yes, that must be it. Yet what was propelling it steadily towards him? There's no breeze in here that he can feel, but goosebumps pop up on his forearms anyway. He turns away - and when he glances back, it's gone, yet he hasn't heard a sound.

Odd.

Ben closes the book and gets up to return it - he's too well-schooled in library etiquette to leave the volume lying there for the librarian to have to clean up after him, though the last thing he wants to do is descend the stairs into the lowest floor. The sooner it's over, the better, he tells himself and hurries down. Once there, it's eerily still - and as he approaches the right shelf, Ben feels his heart speed up.

Something is watching him, he thinks, although the logical part of his brain insists that that's absurd. Ben glances behind - glimpsing a red and white blur. Shoving the book back in place, he scurries toward the exit but is suddenly blocked by a thankfully flesh-and-blood figure. Has the librarian been down here the entire time? Is his mind playing tricks on him?

Ben rushes past the startled woman and crashes out the exit. Bright sunlight blinds him for a few seconds but fortunately whatever it is or isn't has gone.

Safe. For now.